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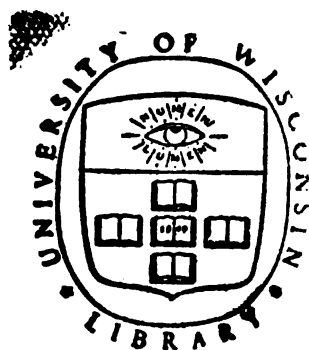
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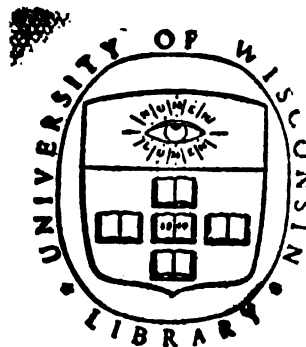
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ANTECEDENTS OF THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU

BY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first attempts to find for the negro a place under freedom belong to the history of military government of conquered territory. No sooner had northern armies touched southern soil than the blacks crowded into the Union lines for protection. They must be fed, clothed, employed and educated. Those who gave the problem deep consideration were the military commanders, the officials of the Treasury department, and the benevolent societies of the North. Their aim was to provide temporarily for the wants of the negro, to organize labor and to establish a system of education. Their earlier attempts served as useful guides in the formation of the Freedmen's Bureau.

At first the policy of the administration was non-interference with slavery in order to conciliate the border states. Each commander in the field was thus left alone to deal with the question in as practical a way as circumstances required. Some of the generals, like Halleck¹ and Dix², refused to allow the slaves to come within the lines and favored their return to their owners. Others, like Fremont³ in Missouri and Hunter⁴

1 Official Records, War of the Rebellion, Series 1, Vol. 8, p.370. Washington, 1880-1900.

2 American Cyclopedia, 1862, p. 754. New York, 1861-1865.

3 Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 3, p.466.

4 Ibid, Vol. 14, p. 341.

in South Carolina, would free them by proclamation; still others, like Butler and Wool, would give the negro temporary aid and labor, and so injure the South by taking away one of her chief sources of strength.

The military commanders were thus uncertain what method to adopt in dealing with the question. This uncertainty undoubtedly arose from the passage of a resolution by Congress, July 4, 1861, which declared that the war was not waged to overthrow or interfere with established institutions of southern states. While this declaration satisfied political theory, it was incapable of solving questions of practical military administration such as were now before the military department. "What shall be done with the fugitive slaves?" became the absorbing question. There was no agreement as to their proper disposal. The Emancipation Proclamation served but to broaden and intensify the difficulties until Congress was forced to take action by the passage of a bill for an organization called the Freedmen's Bureau, which lasted legally from 1865 to 1872. In a sense, however, the idea of a Freedmen's Bureau had its beginnings in 1861. It is the purpose of this work to study the occasions for, the rise, the character of the project and the various movements and plans which led ultimately to the creation of the National Freedmen's Bureau.

At the outbreak of the war the pressure of events raised special questions which had to be met at once. The policies of the different generals were invariably conflicting. It

remained for General Butler in command of Fortress Monroe in the spring of 1861 to forecast a policy with regard to the negroes which later prevailed wherever the Union army exercised any supervision. This was his retention and employment of the negro as "contraband of war." Public opinion began to change, finding its expression in the passage by Congress of a series of confiscation acts. The first of these was passed August 6, 1861, and declared that "If persons held to labor or service were employed in hostility to the United States, the right to their services should be forfeited and such persons be discharged therefrom."¹ This was followed by another act, approved March 13, 1862, which prohibited any person in the military service from giving aid in returning slaves to their former masters.²

The confiscation act of July 17, 1862, declared freedom to slaves of rebels escaping within the Union lines, or captured or deserted by their masters, and to all slaves of rebels found in places occupied by the army. Such were to be forever free.³

Finally, on January 1, 1863, the President issued his Emancipation Proclamation, which declared free all persons held as slaves in certain specified districts and states.⁴ The immediate result of this legislation was to bring under control of our government in already conquered districts large multitudes

1. Session Laws, 37th Congress, 1st session, p. 319. Boston, '61.

2. Session Laws, 37th Congress, 2nd session, p. 354.

3. Ibid., p. 690.

4. Richardson, James D., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, Vol. 6, p. 157. Washington, 1866.

of freedmen. There was as yet no national plan for the care and employment of all the refugees who came to the federal lines. Such work was necessarily left to the different commanders in the field to work out as best they could, until taken over by the national government.

CHAPTER II

FORTRESS MONROE

On May 18, 1861, General Butler, at the time commanding the Department of Annapolis, received orders from General Scott to proceed to Fortress Monroe to assume command at that post. He arrived there on the 22nd.¹ Two days later, three negro field hands belonging to Col. Mallory, in command of the secession forces in that district, escaped to the Union picket guard. It appeared that these men were about to be sent to North Carolina for the purpose of aiding the secession forces there by digging entrenchments. General Butler then determined that for the present, and until officially advised, he would employ these negroes in the quartermaster's department. To these negroes he gave the name of "contraband of war."² When asked by Major Cary on behalf of Col. Mallory as to his policy toward the latter's negroes, Butler replied that he was not bound by any constitutional obligations to give them up, since the Fugitive Slave act could not affect a foreign country, which Virginia by her act of secession claimed to be.³

The situation in respect to slave property was becoming of

1 Official Records, War of the Rebellion, Series 1, Vol. 2, p. 640.

2 Ibid, p.649.

3 Ibid, p.650.

such serious magnitude that General Butler wrote to Secretary of War Cameron detailing its complexities. In the meantime slaves continued to escape to the fort, and General Butler began to employ all the able-bodied ones, issuing food for the support of all and charging against their services the expenses and care of maintenance of the non-laborers.¹ Secretary Cameron replied on May 30, approving General Butler's course of action and ordering him to refuse to surrender any person to alleged masters. The question of their final disposition was to be left to future determination.²

General Butler worked out here among the freedmen a system which presented most of the essential features of the subsequent efforts in their behalf. He gave them employment on a wage basis, caused army rations to be issued to the destitute, and provided for the needs of the non-laborers out of the earnings of the laborers.

Within two months, 900 negroes--men, women and children--had come into the lines, and General Butler again wrote to Secretary Cameron for instructions as to the proper method of their disposal.³ Secretary Cameron replied that no claim could be recognized by the military authority of the Union to the services of fugitive slaves. This he justified by an act of Congress, approved August 6, 1861, that if persons

1 McPherson, Edward, Political History of the Rebellion, p. 244. Washington, 1865.

2 Ibid, p. 314.

3 Moore, Frank, Rebellion Record, Vol. 2, Doc. 132. New York, 1864.

held to service shall be employed in hostility to the United States, the right to their services was thereby discharged.¹ This was the beginning of the work toward emancipation. The contrabands were assigned quarters outside of the fort, or in tents within. They were set to work as servants to officers, or to store provisions landed from vessels, thus relieving the soldiers from such work.² To provide for the proper administration of this new work, Mr. E. L. Pierce was especially detailed from his post in Company L of the Third Massachusetts Regiment to collect the contrabands of Fortress Monroe, record their names, ages, and names of their masters, provide their tools, superintend their labor, and procure their rations.³ Their hours of labor on the entrenchments were from 4 to 7 A. M., 8 to 11 A. M., and 3 to 6 P. M. A soldier's ration was given to each contraband so employed, and a half ration for each dependent.⁴

On August 17, 1861, General Butler was succeeded by General Wool at Fortress Monroe, and under him the employment of fugitives became gradually more systematized, and during the months of October and November, 1861, formal regulations were adopted, which prescribed the pay and rations of the colored

1 Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 1st session, p. 42. Washington, 1865.

2 Atlantic Monthly, November, 1861, Vol. 8, p. 626.

3 Wilson, Henry, Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America, Vol. 2, p. 457. Boston, 1872-1877.

4. Atlantic Monthly, 1861, p. 654.

persons employed in his department. These regulations were embodied in a special order, October 14, 1861, which prescribed that all persons called contrabands, employed as servants by officers or others residing in or outside Fortress Monroe, should be furnished with their subsistence and at least \$8 per month for males and \$4 per month for females by the officers or others so employing them. Provision was also made for the creation of a fund for the support of those contrabands who were unable to work for their own support.¹ All able-bodied negroes who were not employed as servants were put to work in either the quartermaster's or engineer's department.² The negroes were divided into two classes, the first comprising negro men over eighteen years of age and able-bodied. Each was to receive \$10 per month and the necessary amount of clothing. The second class included negro boys from twelve to eighteen years of age, and sickly and infirm negro men. Each received \$5 per month, one ration and the proper amount of clothing.

The department which employed these men furnished the subsistence, and further as an incentive to good behavior each individual of the first class received \$2 per month, and of the second class \$1 per month, for his own use. The remainder of the money valuation of their labor was turned over to the quartermaster, who deducted from it the cost of clothing issued

1 Executive Documents, 37th Congress, 2nd session, Doc. No. 85, p. 2.

2 McPherson, Edward, History of the Rebellion, p. 248.

to them. For unusual amount of labor performed, they received extra pay--from fifty cents to \$1. If any man was prevented from working on account of sickness for six consecutive days, or ten days in any one month, one-half the money valuation was paid; for inability to work for a longer period than ten days,¹ all pay and advances ceased.

In order to get at the actual state and condition of affairs at Fortress Monroe, General Wool, on January 30, 1862, appointed a commission consisting of Col. T. J. Crain, Major L. B. Cannon and William P. Jones. Their instructions were to make a critical examination of the contrabands with reference to their pay, clothing, subsistence, shelter, medical attendance, treatment, physical and moral, census, and the economy² of labor to the government.

The commission made an elaborate report on March 20, 1862. Regarding the matter of clothing, the commission found that in many cases those who worked had not received the amount of clothing to which they were entitled. Under the head of subsistence, it was found that the food was restricted in quantity, and in many instances refused altogether. Their pay and³ their monthly allowances were likewise held back. For shelter, two large buildings had been built by the quartermaster's de-

1 House Executive Documents, 31st Congress, 2nd session, Doc. 85, p. 2 et seq.

2 Ibid, p. 3.

3 Ibid, p. 4.

partment for the use of the contrabands as quarters. These buildings, together with a hospital structure, were erected at public cost and not charged to the contraband fund.¹ Under the head of treatment, various complaints were made that the contrabands were dealt with harshly; that food was often denied them, and that it was deficient in quantity. The commission investigated the source of complaint and found that the negro and the government were being defrauded by persons in the commissary department having this duty in charge.²

These facts led the commission to recommend that the superintendence of the negroes be placed in the hands of a civilian, actuated solely by humanitarian desires and to benefit and elevate this people, morally and religiously, and "to inculcate honesty, industry, economy and temperance."³ The appointment of a provost judge with civil authority to protect the negroes from abuse and to collect their wages was also embodied in the recommendations. General Wool immediately appointed Mr. Charles B. Wilder of Boston as superintendent of contrabands. The chiefs of the various departments--engineering, ordnance, medical, subsistence, and quartermasters,--employing contrabands, as well as all officers, sutlers and citizens were ordered to report to the new superintendent all things relating to their welfare and condition. Hereafter all

1 Executive Documents, 37th Congress, 2nd session, Doc. 85, p. 6.

2 Ibid, p. 5.

3 Ibid, p. 12.

wages earned by the contrabands were to be paid to them for their own use and support, the scale of wages to be determined by individual skill and industry.¹ It was ordered that the quartermaster should pay the laborers who were employed for military purposes, and to deliver the clothing on hand and the balance of the money to Mr. Wilder.² Here then was the first practical attempt to solve the negre problem, a problem which was daily becoming more difficult as the number of refugees increased. One of the most objectionable features of General Wool's plan was that it was not capable of expansion, because of the expense involved and because of the increase in demand for labor in the military departments³ could not keep up with the increased demands for charity. This was fully shown when the Union armies occupied the mainland of Virginia and North Carolina. Reorganization of contraband affairs became necessary and was accomplished by the successors of General Wool. Under General Foster, the supervision of contrabands in Virginia was divided among three superintendents who established contraband camps and made stricter rules regarding wages, labor and supplies. Negroes were given absolute ownership of small lots and were allowed a certain degree of self-government.⁴ This plan, however, did

1 House Executive Documents, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Doc. 85, p. 13.

2 Ibid, p. 14.

3 Ibid, p. 11.

4 New England Freedmen's Aid Society Report, 1864, p.69. Boston, 1864.

not appear to work well, due to the proximity of the Confederates, which prevented the carrying on of plantation labor. It failed also because of looseness in administration and a lack of uniformity in the rules and regulations.¹ When General Butler again took command, November 2, 1863, he promptly established a system more uniform, more centralized, and more adaptable to the conditions than any of the preceding plans had been.

The settlement of the labor problem was his first work. He reorganized the whole department by dividing it into four districts, each with a superintendent. The first district embraced all territory within the federal lines north of the James river and was under the charge of Captain Charles B. Wilder. The second district took in the territory south of the James and was commanded by Captain Orlando Brown. The third district embraced that part of North Carolina held by federal forces under the jurisdiction of Horace James, and the fourth district included the counties of St. Mary in Maryland and of Northampton and Accomac on the eastern shore of Virginia, under supervision of Dr. C. S. Henry.² "In order that their sustenance might be assured, their rights respected, and wrongs redressed," and that there should be one system of management of negro affairs, Col. J. B. Kinsman was appointed general superintendent in the department.³

¹ Report of the National Freedmen's Relief Association, 1866, p. 10. New York, 1866.

² Second Annual Report of New England Freedmen's Society, p. 23.

³ Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 3, p. 1142.

All the district superintendents were required to report to him. The four districts were subsequently divided into nine¹ sub-districts, with an assistant superintendent over each. Colored laborers were required to support themselves in the service of the government. No subsistence was to be furnished them gratuitously. Every negro was expected to work. Each superintendent in his respective district was required to care for the freedmen therein; also to take a census, to provide them with the necessary shelter, clothing, food and medicines, and to protect the negro in his contractual relations with the whites. Furthermore, he must take care of all lands and property allotted or given to the negro, to keep an account of all receipts and expenditures as well as the expenses of the negro² to the government and his earnings for the government. This system remained in practical operation until superseded by the Freedmen's Bureau act.

A different plan was followed for the government of the freedmen on Roanoke Island in the third district. Here were settled about three thousand negroes under the superintendence of George Sanderson and A. R. Storer of Boston, assistants to Captain James. A sawmill was erected and about three hundred cabins were built. Streets were laid out and a kind of municipal organization was established for the colony, which placed

1 Second Annual Report of New England Freedmen's Aid Society, p. 23.

2 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 3, p. 1143.

special power in the hands of fifteen freedmen--the more
talented and educated of these.¹ Each family was allotted
an acre of land, on which a cabin was built and crops
raised for the use of the family. Schoolhouses and churches
were likewise built for their educational and moral ad-
vancement.² Thus when the Freedmen's Bureau finally sup-
planted these original experiments, it found a well-organ-
ized system for dealing with the freedmen in practical
operation.

1 Second Annual Report, New England Freedmen's Aid So-
ciety, 1864, p. 29.

2 Ibid, p. 73.

CHAPTER III

DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH

While these proceedings were being carried on at Fortress Monroe, similar activity was being manifested among the freedmen of South Carolina. In November, 1861, General W. T. Sherman and Admiral Du Pont captured Port Royal, which was followed by the immediate surrender and military occupation of the Sea Islands of South Carolina.¹ The white people fled to the mainland, leaving behind them about ten thousand of their plantation slaves. The federal forces found the negroes in utter destitution and an appeal was made at once to the benevolent people of the North for rations, clothing and other necessities. The appeal received response by the forwarding of a large quantity of supplies and a corps of thirty-one teachers and superintendents to Port Royal.² As the field of operations enlarged with the movements of the armies, the number of teachers increased.

There being no governmental action to meet the new conditions, Secretary Salmon P. Chase of the Treasury department unofficially took charge and sent down Colonel William H. Reynolds temporarily to oversee the collection of cotton left outstanding by the whites. General Sherman, however,

1 Official Records, War of the Rebellion, Series 1, Vol. 6, p. 4.

2 Freedmen's Record, April, 1865, p. 1. Boston, 1865.

saw the greater needs of the negroes and on January 15, 1862, recommended that properly qualified agents be appointed to take charge of the abandoned plantations and to oversee the work of the blacks until they were able to do so for themselves.¹ On February 1, 1862, he issued a second appeal to the philanthropic people of the North in which he called attention, not only to the need for the physical necessities, but for the demand for some system of culture and instruction,

"in order to relieve the government of a burden that may become insupportable."² The result was that relief associations were organized in the northern states, which began to collect and send supplies, teachers, preachers and superintendents of labor.

Among the first to organize in response to these appeals was the New England Freedmen's Aid Society at Boston, February 4, 1862.³ This was followed by the Freedmen's Relief Association, February 20, 1862, and by many others.⁴ The societies volunteered to pay both teachers and superintendents and did so until July 1, 1862, when the proceeds of the cotton crop were used for that purpose. The first expedition sailed from New York on March 3, 1862, with sixty volunteer teachers and superintendents on board under charge of E. L. Pierce.⁵

1 Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 6, p. 218.

2 House Executive Documents, 41st Congress, 2nd session, Doc. No. 142, p. 3.

3 Freedmen's Record, April, 1865, p. 1.

4 Pierce, E.L., Negroes at Port Royal, Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 12, p. 291.

5 House Documents, 41st Congress, 2nd session, Doc. No. 142,

At first no attempt was made to provide work for all the negroes, but on the appointment of Mr. Pierce, February 19, 1862, as agent to take charge of the abandoned lands at Port Royal and vicinity, a definite plan for a social and industrial experiment with the negroes was begun.¹

The negroes were put to work gathering the cotton and preparing it for market. They received a moderate wage for their work, but when paid out for store goods for themselves they amounted to very little, as the corrupt agents charged them² exorbitant prices. At the time Mr. Pierce took charge of the work, there were about fifteen thousand negroes in the Sea Island district. He made a thorough investigation of the conditions there and followed it with a detailed report to Secretary Chase, showing that with proper inducements to labor and under a wise system the negroes might be brought to a self-supporting status.³ He proposed the appointment of superintendents for the large plantations and one for two or three of the smaller ones combined, selected with respect to certain qualifications, with adequate power to enforce discipline, "to require a proper amount of labor, cleanliness and sobriety," and in general to "promote the moral and intellectual life of the freedmen and so prepare them for a useful citizenship."⁴

¹ Annual Cyclopedic, 1862, p. 755.

² McKim, J.M., Freedmen in South Carolina in Rebellion, Pamphlets, Vol. 63, p. 2. Philadelphia, 1862.

³ Pierce, E. L., Negroes at Port Royal, p. 28.

⁴ Ibid, p. 25.

He proposed further that a director-general or governor be appointed who should oversee the work of the superintendents and be vested with liberal powers over all persons within his jurisdiction. The negroes, he declared, should be paid stipulated wages, graduated with respect to the ability of the laborer. For their religious and moral instruction he would obtain missionaries from the societies in the North and teachers from the government.¹ Through these measures Pierce gained the confidence of the negroes, issued rations to them, supplied them with clothing, and gave each a fourth of an acre of land for himself, on which he usually raised corn to supply a deficiency in rations.²

At Hilton Head and at Beaufort a similar policy was followed, except that the negroes were under the charge of the quartermaster's department with a Mr. Lea of Boston as civilian superintendent. He was appointed November 10, 1861, and was instructed to pay the negroes a reasonable amount for their labor, which was as yet not fixed. On December 1, an order was issued that carpenters should be paid \$8 per month, other laborers \$5. Women and children were fed without charge, the women obtaining washing and receiving the pay.³ So that laborers, particularly those with families, fared very well under this order. On January 18, 1862, General Sherman regulated the

1 Pierce, E. L., *Negroes at Port Royal*, pp. 28-29.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

scale of wages, the mechanics receiving \$12 to \$8, and laborers \$8 to \$4 per month.¹ Acting on Pierce's recommendations, General Sherman divided the country then in occupation into districts of convenient size for proper superintendence, over each of which an agent was appointed for the management of the plantations by the blacks; they were to organize them into working parties, see them they were well fed, clothed and paid reasonably for their labor, and finally to take charge of all property on the plantation or any which might subsequently come² into their hands.

To care thus for the blacks and direct their labor, General Sherman appointed two general agents--one to have the superintendence over the general administration and agriculture;³ the other administration over the educational department. By February, 1862, these agents had taken possession of 195 plantations on which there were about 10,000 negroes and 2,500,000⁴ pounds of cotton. Teachers and superintendents were furnished by the relief societies, and the year's work appeared to open with every premise for the success of the experiment. Several causes, however, operated against it. Sufficient money was not provided for carrying on the work; the negroes were never sure of receiving their pay, and so lost confidence in the govern-

1 Pierce, E. L., Negroes at Port Royal, p. 31.

2 House Executive Documents, 37th Congress, 2nd session, No. 72.

3 Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 6, p. 223.

4 Moore, Frank, Rebellion Record, Supplement to Vol. 1, p. 362.

ment; the negroes did not raise enough on their plantations to reimburse the government; and then after the novelty of working under freedom had worn off little was accomplished. A report made in September, 1862, showed that the effective hands employed were 3,817 and the non-effective 3,110; in other words, that about one-half were going back to a life of indolence, making it necessary for the government to provide wholly for them.

The whole experiment was abandoned by order of General Hunter, and on June 28, 1862, the work was transferred from the Treasury to the War department.² General Rufus Saxton of Massachusetts was ordered by the department to take charge and to act independently of military authority so far as the purposes specified in his commission were concerned.³ He arranged the Port Royal and adjacent islands in three divisions and appointed a general superintendent over each. Subordinate local superintendents were assigned to the different islands, each having charge of one or more plantations, who directed the labor of the negroes and prepared them to become self-supporting. Of the 15,000 negroes on the islands, 9,000 were soon engaged in productive or compensated labor as soldiers, agricultural laborers, mechanics, employes in the quartermaster's department, and servants.⁴ So faithfully did the laborers

1 Americal Cyclopaedia, 1862, p. 755.

2 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 2, p. 27.

3 Pierce, E. L., Freedmen at Port Royal, Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 12, 1862, p. 300.

4 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 2, pp. 152-153.

work that in many instances they were able to buy small¹ farms, sold by the commissioners at reasonable prices. Thus far all these steps had been taken without any legislative action or approval.

Mr. Pierce had endeavored to present the subject to several members of Congress with whom he had a personal acquaintance, but they appeared to think that the time was not yet ripe to deal with the question. And it was not until March 3, 1863, that definite action was taken. Congress then passed an act ordering the Secretary of the Treasury to appoint special² agents to collect captured and abandoned property. Accordingly, military officers turned over all such property which had come into their hands. Many of the smaller plantations were sold at tax sales to the negroes, but the majority were bought up by northern men, who hired negroes to cultivate³ them. Thereafter conditions among the freedmen in the Sea Island district were very good, as is shown by a report of General Saxton made to the Secretary of War, February 7, 1864. It showed that the freedmen produced enough to supply themselves with food without cost to the government and cotton⁴ enough to pay all contingent expenses.

When it was seen that the negro was capable of sustaining

1 New England Freedmen's Aid Society Report, 1864, p. 76.

2 Statutes at Large, Vol. 12, p. 820. Boston, 1861-1865.

3 American Cyclopaedia, 1863, p. 430.

4 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, pp. 119-120.

himself, General Saxton suggested to the President the desirability of placing the negro in possession of a suitable portion of the confiscated lands in the district. The President, therefore, in September, 1863, issued orders to the tax commissioners to sell by auction to the highest bidder all the unreserved lands in lots not exceeding 320 acres, reserving a limited lot to be offered at private sale for \$1.25 per acre to negro families, but none to be allowed to have more than twenty acres. This plan was not successful, as it was seen to work in favor of the speculators, who took advantage of the ignorance of the blacks and by buying in large lots virtually placed the lands beyond the reach of the freedmen.¹ Complaints were made to the Treasury department and new instructions were issued by the President on December 30, 1863. Hereafter any loyal person of the age of 21 years or upwards who had lived upon or cultivated any lands in the district for six months since the occupation by the federal forces might enter such land for pre-emption to the extent of one, or at the option of the pre-emptor, two tracts of twenty acres each, on the payment of \$1.25 per acre. Preference was usually given to the heads of families and to married women whose husbands had enlisted in the service. Instructions were immediately given by the superintendent to carry out the order by locating, staking out the claims, and securing title deeds.² In a short time

¹ Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 1025.

² Ibid, pp. 119-120.

claims for pre-emption for nearly all the lands in the district were presented to the tax commissioners and payment tendered for them. The majority of the commissioners refused to allow the claims or to accept the money or to recognize the instructions of the President. These later instructions were thereafter revoked by the Treasury department and land sales took place under the original orders.¹ The result was that negroes were fleeced out of their lands, their homes being sold over their heads at prices far beyond their reach.² To make things worse, the freedmen suffered from non-payment of wages, contradictory orders of generals, and the scheming of northern swindlers.³

Such was the state of affairs among the freedmen when General W. T. Sherman made his memorable march to the sea. On this march he had liberated thousands of slaves, who followed him in the wake of the army to the coast. Realizing the immediate necessity of caring for these totally destitute negroes, he issued his special orders No. 15, which were designed to make temporary provision for the freedmen and their families until the war should end or until Congress should take action. By this order the islands south of Charleston, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering on the St. John's river, Florida, were

1 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 1026.

2 Ibid,

3 New England Freedmen's Aid Society Report, 1864, p. 16.

set apart for the settlement of the negroes. Here no white persons except officers on duty were to be allowed to reside. The exclusive management of affairs was to be left with the freed people themselves, subject only to military authority or to acts of Congress.¹ Young and able-bodied negroes were expected to enlist in the army. Domestics, blacksmiths, carpenters and other mechanics were allowed to choose their own work and residences.² General Saxton was appointed inspector of settlements and plantations. He was required to make proper allotments of land and to give promissory titles until Congress should confirm his action. It was further ordered that whenever three negroes, heads of families, desired to settle on lands within the specified limits, they should be granted a license for that purpose by the inspector. The lands thus granted were subdivided so that each family should have a plot of not more than forty acres of tillable land. Protection was given by the military department. Families of negroes who had enlisted might locate in one of the settlements and acquire a homestead.³ Market houses were established for the sale of produce from the plantations. The blacks were put to work raising cotton and corn for their own support, rations being supplied from the commissary only when necessary.⁴ Thousands of negroes were distributed under this circular, and the freed

1 Sherman, W. T., *Memairs*, Vol. 2, p. 250. New York, 1875.

2 House Executive Documents, 39th Congress, 1st session, Vol. 7, No. 11, p. 10.

3 Ibid.

4 Howard, O.O., *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p. 178. New York 1907.

people regarded themselves as in permanent possession of these abandoned lands. On the educational side, teachers were supplied from the societies of the north.¹

Any family could locate on alternate sections and by the payment of \$25 (\$1.25 per acre) secure a home. It might be paid in installments, one-fourth down and credit given for three years. A system for contracts for labor was established by which the rights of the laborers were protected. On the private plantation the wages of the laborer were declared to be a first lien on the crops raised.² On August 27, 1864, a savings bank was organized at Beaufort to safeguard the blacks from being defrauded by sharpers and to induce them to acquire habits of carefulness and economy.³ General Saxton established civil courts of justice, boards of referees and military commissions for the settlement of all matters at issue between residents of the department not in the military service. These conditions remained in force until the spring of 1865, when the Freedmen's Bureau went into operation. The Port Royal experiment was the first general attempt on a large scale to deal with the complicated problem of the care of the freedmen. That it was uniformly successful, in spite of the perfidy of northern adventurers and the conflicts between the

1 Howard, O.O., Autobiography, Vol. 2, p. 191. New York, 1907.

2 U.S. Commissioner of Education Report, 1900-1901, p. 421. Washington, 1900-1901.

3 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 1022.

civil and military departments, in due to the untiring patience and devotion of Colonel Pierce and General Saxton, and others interested in the welfare of the freedmen. The South Carolina experiment may therefore be regarded as the germ of the Freedmen's Bureau.

CHAPTER IV

DEPARTMENT OF THE GULF

On May 1, 1862, General Butler took formal possession of New Orleans.¹ The number of negroes freed by the occupation of the city was vastly greater than at Fortress Monroe. It was clearly impossible for him to dispose of the question as he had done before by an epigram. At Fortress Monroe the problem was to take care of some 900 fugitives; at New Orleans it was more complex, involving the relations of capital and labor. Any disturbance of the two would have been extremely harmful. There were about 18,000 slaves in New Orleans made free by General Butler, and this number was being augmented daily by others from the surrounding territory. Immediately after the landing of the troops, great numbers of them flocked to the various Union posts--at Fort Philip, Fort Jackson, Carrollton, Algiers, Baton Rouge, and elsewhere.² The attempt to discover the best method of disposing of them was indeed perplexing.

According to an act of Congress passed March 13, 1862, all persons were forbidden to return slaves to their former owners.³ At New Orleans they were not wanted, as there were more than enough white laborers; neither could Butler get governmental

1 Annual Cyclopaedia, 1862, p. 645.

2 Parton, James, General Butler in New Orleans, p. 492.
New York, 1864.

3 Statutes at Large, 37th Congress, 2nd session, p. 354.

sanction, since the government was not yet prepared to announce a negro policy. But on July 31, 1862, Butler received a letter from President Lincoln concerning the fugitive negroes. Though they could not be sent back to their masters, they were not to be permitted to suffer for want of food, clothing and other necessities of life. They were to be provided for by the quartermaster and commissary departments, and those who were capable of labor should be put to work and be paid reasonable wages. However, the President in these directions intended to lay down no general rule in respect to slaves, but merely "to provide for the particular case under the circumstances in which it is presented."¹

As the season advanced the negro question increased in difficulty. Many plantations had been abandoned by their owners, leaving the negroes idle and destitute in their huts. Conquests by the federal forces added greatly to the number of confiscated and abandoned plantations and set free thousands of slaves. Over 10,000 negroes, mostly women and children, gathered in the city and apparently looked to General Butler for support. He therefore determined in October to assume the responsibility of working the abandoned plantations and of employing as many as possible of the fugitives at reasonable wages.

1 Nicolay & Hay, Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 2, p. 198. New York, 1894.

In a special order issued October 20, 1862, he appointed Charles A. Weed to take charge of certain plantations along the river and to gather and make the crops thereon for the benefit of the United States and to draw on the contrabands¹ for labor. The planters claimed that the services of their former slaves still belonged to them and that if deprived of their labor the crops and plantations would be ruined. To protect the rights of both parties, General Butler employed all persons previously held to labor on the plantations in the parishes of St. Bernard and Plaquemines and paid them wages for their work.² The planters reluctantly agreed to the new experiment of free labor, and a contract was drawn up whereby the planter agreed to pay \$10 per month to each able-bodied male person and to provide him with proper food and medicines in case of sickness.³ Hundreds of negroes were thus employed under contracts, and according to a letter which Butler wrote to President Lincoln on November 28, 1862, the experiment proved successful.⁴ In addition to regulating the employment of the blacks by the government and by the planters, Butler recruited colored regiments, aided the helpless, and organized colonies of fugitives. Still, the problem was not solved, and later, December 17, 1862, when General Banks assum-

1 Parton, Butler in New Orleans, p. 522.

2 Ibid, p. 523.

3 Ibid, p. 524.

4 Moore, Rebellion Record, Vol. 6, p. 190.

ed command of the Department of the Gulf, he reported suffering and disease as existing everywhere among the 150,000 negroes in his jurisdiction.¹

Accordingly, he issued a general order, January 30, 1863, making labor on the public works or elsewhere compulsory for persons who had no other means of supporting themselves and families.² A body called the sequestration commission was appointed to take charge of confiscated property. The commission was directed to confer with the planters and other parties and to establish a yearly system of negro labor which should provide for the food, clothing and compensation for blacks at fixed rates or on an equitable proportion of the yearly crop.³ The labor system was far from being one of free labor; rather it was a re-enactment of slavery. The negroes were let out to planters, loyal or disloyal, at wages varying from \$8 to \$2 per month, "continuous and faithful service, respectful deportment, correct discipline and perfect subordination enforced by the officers of the government,"⁴ and those not so employed were engaged on the public works or in the quartermaster's department without pay, except that food, clothing and medical attendance were given to the women and children.

1 Banks, N. P., *Emancipated Labor in Louisiana*, p. 6.

2 *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 15, pp. 666-667.

3 Banks, *Emancipated Labor*, p. 33. New Orleans, 1865.

4 *Second Annual Report of New England Freedmen's Aid Society*, 1864, p. 46.

The quartermaster's department was charged with the duty of harvesting the corn and other crops on the deserted fields and of cultivating abandoned estates, and was empowered to employ idle negroes for this purpose.¹ The commission and the planters failed to agree on any general policy, and Banks then established a commission on enrollment to which were referred all questions relating to the negroes of the district.² Prevost marshals were ordered to arrest all idlers and to put them at work on the public works without other pay than their rations and clothing.³ Under such conditions the problem on the whole was successfully managed, although the negro was, as usual, the victim of the planter's cupidity, suffering from injustice, bad faith and fraud.⁴ It was becoming more apparent than ever that the increasingly large number of idle negroes could not be employed profitably on the public works, and that some other system must be devised by which the negro might depend upon the individual for employment. Banks considered it unsafe to allow the planter and the negro to make their own contracts. At this juncture Colonel Hanks, superintendent of negro labor in the department, became their guardian and protector and made the contracts with the employe for them, compelling the employer to support the old, infirm and young who

1 Banks, *Emancipated Labor*, p. 33.

2 Report of Board of Education for Freedmen, Department of the Gulf, 1864, p. 5. New Orleans, 1865.

3 Moore, *Rebellion Record*, 7, p. 480.

4 Conway, Thomas W., Report on Conditions of Freedmen, Department of the Gulf, 1864, p. 47. New Orleans, 1864.

might belong to the family of the employed.¹ The planters did not like it at first, but later changed their views when they found that by deceiving and defrauding their hired negroes² they could save thousands of dollars.

Such methods as these led General Banks to send from fifteen to twenty of the most intelligent colored men into the different parishes to investigate conditions and make suggestions for the improvement of their fellows. In their report they asked protection against flogging, against employment by masters who had abused them, against separation of families, and for provision for reasonable wages and education for their children.³ All this protection and provision were embodied in Banks' Labor Order, February 3, 1864. By it, the parishes were subdivided into school districts, each with a school under the supervision of a superintendent of education. Laborers were free to choose their own employers, but when a contract was made they were held to it for one year. The hours of labor were fixed, as was the scale of wages, as follows: For first class hands, \$8 per month; second class, \$6; third class, \$5; fourth class, \$3. The employer's crop constituted a pledge for the payment of the laborer's wages.

Good rations, clothing, quarters and medical attendance, besides a plot of ground for cultivation varying from one-

1 Second Annual Report, New England Freedmen's Aid Society, 1864, p. 46.

2 Ibid., p. 47.

3 Banks, Emancipated Labor, p. 38.

fourth to one acre, was provided for each negro. Flogging, separation of families, commutation of wages, sale of whiskey to negroes, unauthorized purchases of property from negroes all were prohibited. Provision was also made for a free labor bank. The governmental power was transferred from the planter to the provost-marshal.¹ This new system appeared to be highly beneficial since the planter was assured of a year's term of service and the negro was assured of his rights, pay and good treatment, and the government was relieved of the burden of employing them.² The planter, however, thought the new rules fostered insubordination among the blacks and that not enough produce was raised to meet the running expenses of the plantation.³ Although successful in individual instances, the plan did not work out as satisfactorily as expected. Theoretically fair, it still failed to protect the laborer, profit the planter, or bring an increase in production.⁴

At the same time a bureau of free labor was established and placed under the direction of Chaplain Thomas W. Conway, who was the general superintendent of freedmen in this department.⁵ This bureau cared for thousands of destitute and unemployed negroes. Conway established home colonies at conven-

1 Senate Executive Documents, 38th Congress, 2nd session, No. 29, pp. 1-4.

2 Banks, Emancipated Labor in Louisiana, p. 15.

3 New York Times, October 7, 1864.

4 Conway, Report on the Freedmen of Louisiana, p. 5.

5 Howard, O. O., Autobiography, Vol. 2, p. 186.

ient places as a place of refuge for the freedmen thrown back by the civil and military authorities. In these colonies labor was forced and there was no pay except rations and clothing. Each home colony had a superintendent, a physician, a cultivator of the land, and a clerk. Both secular and religious schools were in operation. Superintendent Conway regarded it as a most successful scheme for the government and care¹ of the freedmen.

By General Orders No. 23, General Banks promised to provide for the instruction of the negroes' children. In accordance with that promise he issued General Orders No. 38 on March 22, 1864. This created a board of education for freedmen, consisting of three members, with power to establish common schools in each district, employ teachers, build schoolhouses, regulate the courses of study, and have generally the same authority that assessors, supervisors and trustees have in the northern states in the manner of establishing and conducting schools.² To defray the expenses incident to carrying on the work, authority was given to the board to levy a tax upon real and personal property, including the crops of plantations in each school district.³ At the close of 1864, at the end of nine months' existence, the board of education was suc-

1 Conway, Report on Freedmen of Louisiana, p. 5.

2 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 193.

3 Ibid.

cessfully operating 95 schools, with 162 teachers and 9,571 pupils. Night schools were also held for the adults, and 2,000 more received instruction in these.¹ The schools suffered much from prejudice and poverty, but the teachers, most of whom were southern and had had experience, were competent and the system met with general favor from the negroes.² To purchase and provide the necessary books, stationery and apparatus for the use of the schools, each freed person above the age of attending school duty was assessed a sum not to exceed more than \$2.50, which was included in the general tax, but was deducted from the laborer's wages by his employer in case such books were furnished.³

Another change in jurisdiction and in the management of affairs in the Department of the Gulf came when General Stephen W. Hurlbut was appointed to succeed General Banks on September 22, 1864.⁴ About the same time William Pitt Fessenden became Secretary of the Treasury, succeeding Chase, and the affairs concerning the supervision of the freedmen were turned over to the Treasury officials.⁵ The changes made by them, however, were of a minor nature and did not undo nor modify materially the system as established by General Banks and Superintendent Conway.

1 Report of Board of Education, Department of the Gulf, 1864, p. 22.

2 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 193.

3 Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 48, part 1, p. 704.

4 Howard, O.O., Autobiography, Vol. 2, p. 185.

5 Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 48, part 1, p. 704.

Chaplain Conway was retained as general superintendent of freedmen; all freedmen who were able to work must support themselves; all supplies for the freedmen were hereafter charged to the Treasury department.¹ The final report of Superintendent Conway, February 1, 1865, showed conclusively that the system worked out in the Department of the Gulf was as near self-supporting as it was possible to make it. The average number of blacks supported by the government during the year was 1,000. The number of freedmen on the 1,500 plantations which were managed by the Bureau during the year was 50,000.² A large number of these received instruction in the day and night schools. When the control of the department passed to the Freedmen's Bureau, there was very little of change in policy with reference to supervision and labor.

1 Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 48, part 1, p. 704.

2 Ibid.

CHAPTER V
DEPARTMENT OF THE WEST

In the Department of the West, including Tennessee and Arkansas, conditions similar to those in the South and East prevailed. November, 1862, had seen Grant in the West with his headquarters at La Grange, Tennessee, in the southwestern part of the state, steadily moving towards Vicksburg. Large numbers of slaves were set free by his armies, and without waiting for instructions from the government he took up the solution of the negro problem. He began to employ them at once on the fortifications, in the camp, and at such other work as was available. On November 11, 1862, he appointed Chaplain John Eaton Jr., of the 27th Ohio Volunteers to take charge of the contrabands, organize them into companies, care for them properly, and set them to work ginning and baling all cotton left standing in the fields.¹ Four days later Grant wrote to General Halleck that the negroes were coming in by wagonloads² and asked what should be done with them. Halleck replied that he should employ the refugee negroes as teamsters, laborers on the forts and railroads, and in removing the cotton for the benefit of the Government.³ These were meager instructions for such a large task, which was becoming more difficult as

1 Eaton John, Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, p. 5. New York, 1907.

2 Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 42, part 1, p. 470.

3 Ibid.

the armies moved southward. Thousands of negroes congregated at Grand Junction, Tennessee, and made it quite impossible to advance. Labor such as was designated in General Halleck's instructions was sufficient to employ but a small portion of them. Under Chaplain Eaton, contrabands over ten years of age were put to work gathering the cotton and corn crops from the abandoned plantations. Their wages were determined by Grant and Eaton. They received twelve and one-half cents per pound from the quartermaster for picking and ginning the cotton, which was sent north to be sold for the benefit of the government.¹ Under similar compensation, woodcutters were employed² in supplying wood for the government steamers on the river. At once the contrabands became self-supporting. The money was not paid to them directly but was spent for their benefit. In this way a fund was created sufficient to feed and clothe all³ and to build cabins and hospitals for the negroes.

The first contraband camp established by Chaplain Eaton was at Grand Junction, Tennessee. Old tents were used for shelter besides all available houses left by Confederate owners.⁴ All fugitives were ordered by General Grant to be sent to Chaplain Eaton, who would care for them and provide work.⁵ The camp gradually assumed some degree of order and gave promise of bet-

1 Grant, U. S., Memoirs, Vol. 2, p. 424, New York, 1885-'86.

2 Howard, O. O., Autobiography, Vol. 2, p. 179.

3 Grant, Memoirs, Vol. 2, p. 424.

4 Eaton, p. 20.

5 Grant, Vol. 2, p. 426.

ter things in the future. Squads of negroes, both men and women, under the protection of soldiers went into the deserted fields to gather the crops. These efforts to provide for the negro in the West have been called "the first systematic effort for the relief of the freedmen."¹ It was from this effort, according to General Grant, that the idea of the Freedmen's Bureau originated.² But Grant did not know of the plans already worked out in the East and South by Generals Wool, Sexton and Butler in which the germ of the bureau was as clearly apparent as in those devised by General Grant. Seeing the need for a more comprehensive plan in behalf of the negroes, Grant further extended Eaton's activities in an order issued from his headquarters at Oxford, Mississippi, December 17, 1862. Under it, he appointed Chaplain Eaton as general superintendent of contrabands for the whole department, with power to appoint such assistants as necessary. He was authorized to use the contrabands on the railroads, steamboats, or any place where their services could be profitable. If hired out to private parties, they should be paid according to previous orders. The negroes were clothed and provided for out of their own earnings.³ Through a defeat of the Union forces at Holly Springs, in the northern part of Mississippi, the contraband camp at Grand Junction

1 House Executive Documents, 39th Congress, 1st session, No. 11, p. 10.

2 Grant, Memoirs, Vol. 2, p. 426.

3 Eaton, pp. 26-27.

was moved to Memphis, and Superintendent Eaton appointed Chaplain A. S. Fiske of the Fourth Minnesota Volunteers as superintendent of the colored people there.¹ He was immediately sent north to obtain relief for the thousands of destitute refugees collected in that region and along the Mississippi river.² Similarly, contraband camps during the year 1863 had been established at places where they were most needed, as at Nashville, Clarksville and Gallatin,³ Tennessee, at Louisville and Camp Nelson, Kentucky, at Huntsville, Alabama, and other places.

The Department of the Tennessee and Arkansas was subsequently extended southward in the Mississippi valley and added to the care of Superintendent Eaton and his assistants⁴ 770,000 more blacks. To facilitate the work, the territory was divided into three districts--those of West Tennessee, Arkansas and Vicksburg. These main divisions were again subdivided into smaller districts, each with its own superintendent but subject to the authority of Colonel Eaton. Unable to give the entire work his personal attention, Colonel Eaton appointed Samuel Thomas of the Vicksburg district as assistant general superintendent. The efforts of the officers were directed to the supply of labor, the arrangement of

1 Eaton, p. 32.

2 House Executive Documents, 41st Congress, 2nd session, Document No. 142, p. 4.

3 Senate Executive Documents, 38th Congress, 2nd session, Document No. 28, pp. 10-12.

4 Report of General Superintendent of Freedmen, Department of the Tennessee and Arkansas, 1864.

educational affairs, and the supplying of medicines and medical attendance. For a period of nine months the work in behalf of education was a conspicuous failure.¹ Then acting under instructions from the War Department, Superintendent Eaton was authorized to appoint officers as superintendents of colored schools. In carrying out this order Eaton designated Rev. L. H. Cobb to the schools in the district of Memphis, Rev. J. A. Hawley in the district of Vicksburg, and Rev. Joel Grant to the district of Arkansas. Each district likewise had its local schools provided with teachers, sent out mainly from the northern benevolent societies.² Pupils were expected to pay 25 cents to \$1.25 per month for tuition. Industrial schools were also set up in which the pupils were taught how to make clothing for themselves, and other useful articles.

To meet the medical necessities of the situation, Dr. D. O. McCord was appointed surgeon-in-chief of freedmen. His powers under the appointment proved inadequate to meet the conditions, and he was appointed under orders of the Secretary of War as medical director with power to employ surgeons and control medicines.³ The system was far from being successful because of the appalling sanitary condition of the people and the lack of medicines or doctors. It was

1 Report of General Superintendent of Freedmen, 1864, p.7.

2 Ibid, p. 86.

3 Ibid, p. 8.

impossible for the plantations to secure medical assistance, and the planters felt no responsibility in looking after the sanitary condition of the laborers. The result was that large numbers died.¹

There were many plans proposed for labor organization, but the order of Adjutant General Thomas in March, 1864, settled on the plan of leasing abandoned plantations by the Treasury department. They were leased by hundreds until all the best plantations, particularly in Arkansas, were taken up.² Negroes were hired out to the lessees, who agreed to pay them fixed wages, but who, however, failed to abide by the stipulation. In Helena, Arkansas, over \$20,000 was withheld from the negroes by the designing planters, and the same was true in other localities.³ To remedy this difficulty and to reconcile the diverse interests of the planter and negro, Colonel Samuel Thomas was appointed provost-marshal with power to appoint assistants. Thereafter conditions improved somewhat. The labor of negroes in supplying the government steamers on the Mississippi was an extremely large source of profit to them. In this district they had cut and delivered to steamboats over 60,000 cords of wood, bringing to the freedmen over

1 Report of General Superintendent of Freedmen, p. 55.

2 Ibid, p. 15.

3 Facts Concerning the Freedmen, 1863, (Emancipation League circular), p. 7. Boston, 1863.

\$120,000 and saving to the government about \$90,000.¹ In many instances, too, negroes leased small tracts of land-- five or six acres--and worked them successfully. This plan, however, was not put in general operation.² The opportunities which the whole system of compensated labor gave to the planter to steal from the black by overcharging, and the inducements it offered to the black to steal from his fellows in order to reduce the expense of living, made a change necessary.

Accordingly, in February, 1864, authority in freedmen's affairs passed from the Treasury department into military hands. The plantation system was retained but new regulations were adopted regarding wages. Hereafter the rates were to be \$13 and \$10 per month, and rations provided.³ Home farms were established at various places in the district for newcomers and the helpless, infirm and aged.⁴ This latter system of providing for the negroes remained essentially intact until taken over by the National Freedmen's Bureau in the following March.

1 Report of Eaton of the Department of Tennessee and Arkansas, p. 24.

2 Ibid, p. 50.

3 Ibid, p. 56.

4 Ibid, p. 69.

In the Department of the Cumberland there appeared to be no organized provision for the contrabands. Great crowds of blacks congregated about every army depot. The policy of Military Governor Johnson and of army officers was to keep them out of the lines. When this was seen to be impossible, efforts were begun to provide for them temporarily. An old deserted chapel near Nashville was pressed into service by putting into it what women and children could be accommodated. Rations were drawn for all and as fast as possible the negroes were hired out. Under orders of the War department issued December 19, 1863, Captain Ralph Hunt was placed in charge of the contrabands in this department.¹ He established a permanent camp at Nashville and began to employ the able-bodied negroes on the fortifications and in cultivating the soil.

In June, 1864, the Secretary of War appointed a committee consisting of Hon. Thomas Hood and S. W. Bostwick to investigate and report on the condition and treatment of these refugees in the Department of the Cumberland. The committee advocated the enlistment of all male negroes capable of military service into companies and regiments, and that those incapable of enlisting, together with women and children, be made to perform such labor as was suitable for them in the staff

1 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 770.

departments of the army, on the plantations or farms, as¹ woodcutters, teamsters, etc., or in any available way. All loyal citizens might hire negroes to work on their plantations but must agree to pay, feed, clothe and treat them humanely, the contract to last not less than one year. If there was a scarcity of such loyal employers, the generals in their respective districts might designate abandoned or confiscated plantations on which the negroes should work and become self-sustaining.² Schools and churches were established at Nashville for the freedmen by the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Aid Society, the pupils paying \$1 per month for tuition. The same policy was carried out in other places in the Cumberland valley where the contraband camps were in operation.³ Chaplains were also directed to make instruction of the colored regiments a part of their work. Except in one or two instances, all the camps in East and Middle Tennessee and in northern Georgia and Alabama were exclusively under military control.⁴ There was no further change in the management of affairs within the department until the Freedmen's Bureau took charge.

1 Senate Executive Documents, 38th Congress, 2nd session, No. 28, p. 21.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 772.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

A sketch of the work in behalf of the freedmen of the Mississippi valley will overlap in some respects that done in Tennessee and Arkansas and other parts of the Southwest. But the work here presents some striking differences and hence deserves special notice. As the Union armies under Grant advanced to Vicksburg, the slaves escaped by thousands to the federal lines until Grant had over 50,000 freedmen in his camp along the Mississippi river.¹ New regulations were necessary, and Grant issued orders for a detailed plan for the care of the blacks and directing their labor. At all military posts camps were established for the employed, officers appointed to distribute supplies, provide employment, attend to contracts, see that wages were reasonable, treatment humane, and the families not separated.² It was ordered that the negroes be employed so far as possible on the public works, in gathering the crops on the abandoned fields, or hired out to the planters. It was made the duty of the provost-marshal to see that every negro within the jurisdiction of the military department was employed by some white person

1 Report of Secretary of War, 1869-'70, Vol. 1, p. 497.
Washington, 1870.

2 American Cyclopaedia, 1863, p. 428.

or sent to the freedmen's camps,¹ Planters were allowed to make contracts with the blacks for wages by the month, or, in the case of families, by the year, the employee in each case agreeing to furnish the food and clothing to the laborer and to support the members of the family unable to work. The rate of wages was fixed at one-twentieth of the value of the crop² and employes were required to give bond to treat them kindly. The abandoned plantations were seized by the government and leased to private persons who employed the freedmen. In some places where the plantations were abandoned, the negroes who were left behind asserted what might be called a squatter claim and gathered the crops on their own account. The scheme appeared to meet with the approval of the President and he announced that the occupation of the abandoned plantations and the employment of the freedmen thereon might be considered as the settled policy of the government.³ Preparations began at once to lease the plantations to such loyal persons as would agree to employ the negroes. The whole matter was placed under the supervision of General Lorenzo Thomas, who was directed by the War department to make an inspection of the military situation in the West,⁴ especially with reference to the conditions of the freedmen. He advocated the leasing of the plantations

1 Moore, Rebellion Record, Vol. 7, p. 480.

2 New York Times, August 30, 1863.

3 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 4, p. 124.

4 Garner, James W., Reconstruction in Mississippi, p. 250.
New York, 1901.

adjacent to the camps, and on April 5, 1863, issued a series of instructions covering the territory bordering on the Mississippi. He then appointed three commissioners, George B. Field, Captain A. E. Schickle and Rev. D. S. Livermore, whose duty it was to superintend the leasing of plantations and deal¹ equitably with the interests of both employer and employed.

The lease was usually in the form of a permit and granted to the lessee the right to "use, farm and enjoy" the possession of a certain plantation until January 1, 1865. He was required to take an oath of allegiance to the United States to pledge himself to employ a certain number of able-bodied freedmen, to care for the infirm of the family, to furnish them with a specified amount of provisions, and not to punish² inhumanely any employee. General Thomas rather encouraged private enterprise against a system of government colonies, like those which prevailed under Colonel Eaton in Tennessee or Arkansas. He fixed the wages of able-bodied negroes over fifteen years of age at \$7 per month, women \$5 per month, and³ children between twelve and fifteen years at \$2.50 per month. These rates were exceedingly low, perhaps due to the fact that free negro labor in the Mississippi valley was as yet an unknown quantity. He laid a tax for revenue of \$2 per 400 pounds on cotton and five cents per bushel on corn and pota-

¹ American Cyclopaedia, 1863, pp. 428-429.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

toes, and made payable to the government instead of rent. The tax was to be collected by agents of the Treasury department. Military protection was not guaranteed, but every effort was made to insure the safety of those leasing or working on plantations.¹ The lessee pledged himself to employ all negroes hired by him or turned over to him by the commission until February 1, 1864, clothing to be deducted from wages.² The character of the whole scheme was largely experimental, so much so that General Thomas in the fifth paragraph of his order said that if it should be found impracticable to hire all the negroes needing employment to responsible lessees, superintendents were to be appointed who should manage the land for the sole benefit of the government and of the freedmen.³

The plan of General Thomas did not work out satisfactorily and practically ensured the continuance of the efforts inaugurated by the officers of the Freedmen's department. At this point, at the close of the year 1863, the management of freedmen affairs passed from the War to the Treasury department.⁴ A new commission, with W. P. Mellen of the Treasury at the head, was appointed to establish more careful regulations than were those of General Thomas, and more in the interest of the laborer. In this he was ably assisted by

1 American Cyclopaedia, 1863, pp. 428-429.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Official Records, Series 3, Vol. 3, Serial No. 124,

President Yeatman of the Western Sanitary Commission, who made a tour of inspection in the valley in the latter part of 1863. He submitted his report December 17, 1863, and suggested a plan for the organization of freed labor and the leasing of plantations along the Mississippi. It provided for a bureau appointed by the government to take charge of leasing land, to secure justice to the freedmen,¹ and to encourage the negroes to righteous living. Each commissioner had a limited district to supervise, to fix the wage scale of the laborers, examine and approve contracts. Supervising agents were appointed, who were under the superintendents. Home farms were to be established as homes for the young, the aged and infirm negroes, and as employment bureaus. Cruel punishment was prohibited, family relations regulated and medical attendance provided. Schools were established at which attendance was compulsory. Laborers should be paid good wages, have good quarters,² food and clothing.

President Yeatman presented his plan to the Secretary of the Treasury, who invited him to cooperate with Mr. Mellen, the special supervising agent of the department, in the formation of the new regulations under which it pro-

1 Yeatman, James, Report on Condition of the Freedmen of the Mississippi, December, 1863.

2 Ibid.

posed to take control of the freedmen. The result was that the Yeatman plan was adopted by Mr. Mellen practically in its entirety. It proved to be the most satisfactory plan that had yet been tried in this region.¹ However, it was not satisfactory to Colonel Eaton, as it brought his officers into collision with the Treasury officials. So he went to Washington to lay the whole case before the President.² In the meantime Secretary Fessenden of the Treasury inaugurated a new plan for the freedmen and abandoned lands. Under regulations issued July 29, 1864, plantations or portions of them were leased to loyal citizens, preference being given to those desiring small tracts of land. No lessee was allowed to lease more than one abandoned plantation, and in all cases where free labor was employed the lessee paid a rental of one cent per pound on all cotton and a proportional charge upon other products. Freedmen's home farms were established at convenient places, each under a superintendent. The freedmen were registered and employed in the respective districts in which the Home farm was situated, unless hired by employers.³ A classification of laborers was made and a schedule of wages fixed, as follows: Sound persons from twenty to forty years of age were first

1 American Cyclopaedia, 1863, p. 430.

2 Eaton, p. 167.

3 New England Freedmen's Aid Society Report, 1864, pp. 74-75.

class hands and received \$25 per month; from fifteen to nineteen and from forty-one to fifty years inclusive were No. 2 hands and received \$20 per month; from twelve to fourteen and over fifty years were third class hands and received \$15. The corresponding classes of women received \$18,¹ \$14 and \$10 respectively. It was the duty of the superintendent of each colony to provide work for all capable of working. Besides paying the wages fixed by the schedule, the planter obligated himself to take care of the young children of the family hired by him, to furnish without charge a separate house for each family with an acre of ground for the garden, medical attendance for the sick, and schooling for the children, and to sell food and clothing to the negroes at actual cost.² Under these regulations a number of Home farms were formed. The supervisor of each obtained work animals, agricultural implements and other supplies. He kept a complete record of the former owner of the land, the name, age, residence, trade or occupation of each colonist; recorded all births, marriages and deaths and the coming and going of each employee. All the parties concerned were put under written contracts,³ for the fulfillment of which the superintendents of the Home farms were

1 New England Freedmen's Aid Society Report, 1864, p.75.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

responsible. Theoretically, this plan was superior to that of General Thomas, but in practice the new system was subject to many complications. The question of giving the plantations protection from physical violence was full of difficulty, which necessarily reacted on industrial conditions. The lessees, in their eagerness to acquire wealth, rented lands in districts where exposure to the rebel armies was inevitable. As a result, impossible demands were made upon the military forces for the sole benefit of the planter. Then, too, speculators were drawn into the district because of the high price of cotton. They came to make money whether the negro suffered by their operations or not. The army was made to assert its authority over affairs controlled by the Treasury, and the Treasury had no means by which to enforce its rules in a district where martial law prevailed. As a consequence, scarcely any authority was exercised at all. At this stage, Colonel Eaton went to Washington again to lay the matter before the President, who after hearing him referred him to Secretary Fessenden. The secretary not being in, Eaton told the substance of his story to the assistant secretary, Mr. Harrington, who thereupon, August 11, 1864, issued an order that all action under the regulations of July 29 concerning freedmen¹ were suspended.

¹ Eaton, p. 170.

The order was later approved by Secretary Fessenden, who directed that the system and arrangements previously inaugurated by Colonel Eaton should be continued until the present season closed and until the Treasury department was prepared to assume control again.¹ The Freedmen's department under Colonel Eaton and his agents took complete charge of negro affairs and administered them along the lines indicated in the Treasury regulations. Wherever the army went, its officers constituted themselves into courts for the freedmen, administered justice and exercised absolute control over all relations between the two races and between themselves.² The position of the Freedmen's department in its relation to the Treasury department and to the government generally remained practically unchanged until the organization of the Freedmen's Bureau was effected in March, 1865.

1 Eaton, p. 171.

2 Fleming, W. L., Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama, p. 423. New York, 1905.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

From 1861 to 1865 the Federal government had to provide in some way for the numerous blacks who crowded into the Union lines. The policies pursued to meet the situation were various and conflicting. Some commanders put the refugees at work on fortifications or about the camp; others concentrated them in colonies, under supervision of army officers, usually chaplains. All of them gave supplies to the negroes. The Treasury agents and the benevolent societies had likewise dealt with all the problems of the negroes with which the Freedmen's Bureau was later called upon to deal, namely, abandoned and fugitive negroes and abandoned and confiscated plantations. One fact stands out clearly in their early attempts to settle the problems connected with the negro. Throughout the South serious attempts were made to regulate the sale, leasing and cultivation of these lands; the employment of the blacks by lessees or planters, and by the government on plantations and in military camps, home colonies and infirmary farms; to distribute rations, clothing, medicines, and other supplies; to provide for the religious, moral and intellectual needs of the negroes by properly qualified teachers. As a result, relief had been given to the infirm, the aged, and the sick in the camps or on the

plantations. A beginning had been made in the education of the blacks, and measures had been taken for the regulation of labor and the ensuring of justice between planter and laborer. While a great amount of good had been accomplished, still only a fraction of the colored people were reached by these various agencies. Where their operations did extend, however, the transition to the National Freedmen's Bureau was made easy and served as an efficient basis upon which to organize the larger work. That these early attempts to care for the negroes were not more successful was due to several reasons. It was difficult to control the policy and acts of the planters, many of whom were disloyal and worked for their own selfish interests. Difficulties also arose over the functions of the War department, the agents of the Treasury department and the officers of the Freedmen's department. Many camps and plantations failed because of incompetent and corrupt agents in charge. Undoubtedly the greatest factor which operated against the success of these early attempts was the lack of a systematic, centralized administration. This was characteristic both of the government and the benevolent organizations. Military commanders aimed at centralization within their own departments. The Treasury department had a system for the administration of plantations and the regulation of labor, and so long as the government had two sets of agents

in the field, each bent on carrying out a different policy, it was impossible to prevent confusion. On the whole, the plans worked out by each served as a useful guide for the work of the Freedmen's Bureau.

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